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RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHIN #0691/01 0860954
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 270954Z MAR 07
FM AIT TAIPEI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4627
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 6532
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 7776

UNCLAS AIT TAIPEI 000691

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DEPARTMENT PASS AIT/WASHINGTON

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-TAIWAN RELATIONS, DPRK, IRAN

11. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies continued to focus news coverage March 27 on the 2008 presidential elections, on the alleged scandal involving the privatization of the Taiwan Television Enterprise, and on other local issues. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an op-ed piece in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" provided a unique perspective on strategic thinking in U.S.-Taiwan relations. The articles pointed out that how Beijing determines its future national status will have a strong impact on the U.S. position and its corresponding policies toward China. An op-ed piece in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times," on the other hand, discussed the appointment of Taiwan's incumbent Mainland Affairs Council Chairman Joseph Wu as the new TECRO chief. The article said "Wu's mission will be a daunting one. He will have to engage in substantive diplomacy, restore mutual trust between Washington and Taipei and help bolster friendly and mutually beneficial relations between the US and Taiwan." With regard to North Korea, a column in the pro-status quo "China Times" said the real substantive change now happening in Northeast Asia is that Pyongyang, sensing China's threats against its regime, has started to keep its distance from Beijing and to develop relations with Washington proactively. A separate "China Times" column discussed Iran and said Iran's determination to confront the United States is far stronger than what the public have imagined, because the Iranians firmly believe that the United States intends to cheat, oppress and even destroy their nation. End summary.

12. U.S.-Taiwan Relations

A) "Strategic Thoughts on U.S.-Taiwan Relations"

Xue Litai, research fellow at Stanford University's Center for International Security and Cooperation, noted in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 520,000] (3/27):

"Beijing normally appears willing to compromise when dealing with issues involving the United States, but the Taiwan issue stands out as the most dangerous exception. The conflicts surrounding Taiwan's status have far exceeded the issue of national dignity. ... It is obvious that in the foreseeable future, the question regarding which direction cross-Straits relations will slide toward -- as judged from the bigger strategic picture and regardless of other factors -- at least involves Beijing's policy about how it will determine China's future national status, and as to what ensues, the United States' perception and judgment of China's national position as well as its corresponding policies [derived from such perception]. When discussing the future direction of cross-Straits relations and the hidden reality of Washington's Taiwan policy in the past, scholars and officials from all three sides rarely talk about the possible impact of China's national positioning on the U.S. position and its relevant policies. But this is in reality the crucial point. To put it more straightforwardly, this layer is the real truth beneath the surface, whereas the 'policies' and 'positions' are merely ways of saying it.

"Taipei is showing enormous energy as it manages to survive while sandwiched between the two giants - the United States and China - and is able to make one move after the other. Even though both Beijing and Washington want to prevent a big war of the century, they cannot exclude the possibility of both sides making a military showdown over the Taiwan issue. Every side is watching with its eyes wide open as cross-Strait relations slide toward a precipitous cliff, but no one can do anything about it."

B) "Though Challenges Ahead for Wu"

Li Thian-hok, a freelance commentator based in Pennsylvania, commented in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (3/27):

"... [Joseph] Wu is familiar with President Chen Shui-bian's ideas and vision for Taiwan and has the full confidence of the president. There is therefore cause for optimism that the new envoy will be able to contribute to the restoration of mutual trust between Washington and Taipei in the critical last year of Chen's presidency. ... One of Wu's first tasks -- even before he leaves for the US -- will be to ensure that Chen ceases making such provocative statements by explaining to him the difficult situation the US is facing. US military forces are bogged down in Iraq and Afghanistan and extrication appears years away. If there is a conflict over Taiwan, the already overstretched US military might not be able to join the battle in time.

"In another scenario, the US would arrive late on the scene and take heavy casualties. In any event, the US President George W. Bush administration feels that any decision to involve the US military in battle against the PLA in the Taiwan Strait should be made by Washington, not by Taipei. Taiwan must be sensitive to US fears that any action by Taiwan could be perceived by Beijing as a move

toward formal independence and trigger a conflict at a most inopportune time. This does not mean, however, that Taipei should kowtow to each and every whim of the Bush administration, which is so preoccupied with the Middle East quagmire that it pays little attention to the growing potential for conflict in the Taiwan Strait, with or without provocation by Taiwan. ...

"Wu's second task as representative to the US will be to educate the US policy elite on the objectives and strategy of the pan-blue opposition, which seeks Taiwan's annexation by China at the earliest opportunity. Hence, their consistent opposition to the acquisition of US weapons, which are badly needed for the defense of the nation. Through its united front tactics, China is effectively interfering in Taiwan's domestic politics. Even though the Taiwan Relations Act purports to protect the human rights of Taiwanese -- including their right to determine their own future -- Washington may be reluctant to get in the middle of partisan bickering between the DPP and the pan-blue opposition. ...

"It is unreasonable for the US to hold Taipei to its 'four noes, one without' promise when the US is unable to persuade Beijing to renounce the use of force and cease its active preparation for war. Washington should be reminded that while, in the short term, the US may need to avoid conflict with China over Taiwan, its long-term strategic interests require Taiwan to resist annexation by the PRC, because once Taiwan falls, it would be very difficult for Japan to resist becoming a vassal state of China. US forces will then have to be withdrawn from Asia and the US' political, economic and strategic interests in the Western Pacific would sustain incalculable losses.

"Yet to sustain their morale and will to resist Chinese aggression, Taiwanese must have hope that their struggle to maintain their freedoms has a chance of success, with support from allies such as the US and Japan. This means Washington must be careful in its dealing with Taipei, lest it give the impression that the US is working with Beijing to undermine Taiwan's sovereignty and democracy. Washington should weigh the inherent dilemma between its short-term goal of avoiding war in the Taiwan Strait and the longer-term objective of denying China's hegemonic ambitions in Asia. Preserving Taiwan's freedoms is also the way to steer China toward peaceful development. Wu should urge the Bush administration

to consider dropping its insistence upon the 'four noes, one without' -- for Chen and his successor. Wu's mission will be a daunting one. He will have to engage in substantive diplomacy, restore mutual trust between Washington and Taipei and help bolster friendly and mutually beneficial relations between the US and Taiwan."

13. DPRK

"Keeping a Distance from Beijing, Pyongyang Starts to Embrace Washington"

Deputy Editor-in-Chief Kuo Chen-lung noted in the International Column in the pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] (3/27):

"The interaction between North Korea, the United States, and China in the past, to put it simply, was that the United States could do nothing about Pyongyang, while the latter relied on China. As a result, whenever the United States sought help from China, China could use North Korea as a bargaining chip to take advantage of the United States in international relations or even cross-Straits relations. But the sudden change in Washington-Pyongyang relations recently has not only surprised Japan and South Korea but has also astounded China. ...

"The real substantive change happening in Northeast Asia is: sensing China's threats against its regime, Pyongyang starts to keep a distance from Beijing and to develop relations with Washington proactively. Judged from this perspective, Kim Jong-il's move to spend the Lantern Festival at the Chinese embassy in Pyongyang did not signify his appreciation toward China over the latter's assistance to North Korea, as the world has imagined. Instead, it was a diplomatically perfunctory move simply to give China face."

14. Iran

"Iran Still Will Not Yield to the UNSC Resolution"

The "International Outlook" column in the pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] wrote (3/27):

"... Iran's determination to resist the United States is far beyond what the world has generally imagined, and in order to confront the United States, Iran resists all Western policies against itself as well. What happens here is neither the clash of civilizations, as Samuel Huntington has pointed out, nor conflicts between Islamic and

Christian culture, but the fact that Iranians firmly believe that the United States intends to cheat and oppress and even to destroy their nation. As a result, the usually divided Iran is tightly united now. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is not stupid; he is so anti-U.S. because he understands the Iranians' emotions at this moment. Thus, the stronger the pressure imposed by the Western world gets, the less possible it is for Iran to yield. ..."

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